CIA Admits Study Of Domestic Group Despite 1975 Ban

By Angus Mackenzie
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A CIA court statement has revealed that the agency maintained an active intelligence project through January, 1979, aimed at the U.S. Student Association, which represents 3 million American students at 360 institutions.

The CIA action will be addressed by a special panel at the association's annual convention in Atlanta starting next Thursday.

The intelligence disclosures came in a "document disposition index" filed by the agency with the U.S. District Court. Targeting of domestic organizations was supposed to have been halted in 1975.

President Reagan ordered the CIA back into domestic operations on Dec. 4, 1981, sparking protests from many civil liberties organizations.

The student group, which until 1978 was called the National Student Association (NSA), sued in June, 1982, for access to its CIA file. In a widely publicized 1967 controversy, the NSA had been exposed as a CIA front.

The CIA document index was submitted to the court in an effort to keep the student group's file secret. Under normal court procedures, when a government agency wants to keep records closed, it must acknowledge what documents it possesses and explain why they should be hidden from the public.

The student association is now trying to convince U.S. District Court Judge June L. Green to order the release of the 1,500 CIA documents accumulated through 1979 and listed in the index.

In a surprise move June 21, Green ordered the agency to produce for her inspection "an unexpurgated copy of every 25th document it has indexed in this action," according to CIA attorney Molly Jean Tasker. Those documents were submitted to the judge July 8.

The step was unusual for two reasons, said the students' attorney, David Sobel: the judge asked for the documents instead of waiting for the student association to request her inspection, and she refused a CIA request, usually granted, to supply affidavits describing the secret documents.

According to the document index, the CIA accumulated more than 372 pages on the student group after February, 1969, including 28 pages in 1978. All CIA-originated materials regarding the organization from 1978 on, and most from other recent years, are being withheld by the agency.

These materials are classified "Secret" because, according to the index, they reveal "intelligence methods" and contain CIA employe names as well as "intelligence sources" and "cryptonyms and pseudonyms."

The index, which was obtained by this reporter from Sobel, notes that one document, dated Aug. 4, 1978, "consists of brief statements which would identify a method used to support intelligence activities." Another, dated July 27, 1978, "states in precise detail, step by step, a method used to support intelligence activities."